Improving the Interview Process: 
7 Steps for Healthcare HR
White Paper

Source. Evaluate. Interview. Give feedback. Gather feedback. Compare results. Finally — make a hiring decision. These are the 7 steps of the hiring process for most organizations, but they don’t tell the whole story.

The interview process is not black and white for any industry, but hiring in healthcare is especially complex. Multiple facilities, a wide range of positions to fill, 3 shifts, strict HR compliance regulations, and high turnover are just some of the factors that contribute to the challenging world of hiring in healthcare.

To thrive, healthcare organizations must consistently hire top talent — doctors, nurses, and other staff members who are service-oriented and capable of helping organizations satisfy their distinct and critical mission. To do so, healthcare HR professionals need to make sure their interview process is as efficient and effective as possible.

Two key trends are impacting the ways that healthcare organizations interview, HCAHPS scores and the downturn in the U.S. economy. Healthcare reform, specifically HCAHPS, is driving healthcare organizations to heighten their focus on patient satisfaction and service excellence by hiring and retaining quality talent. At the same time, the flailing U.S. economy spurred many to view the healthcare industry as an opportunity for stable employment. According to the Wall Street Journal and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the healthcare industry added 31,300 new jobs to the U.S. economy in July 2011 — a larger increase than most other industries. For some organizations, this increase in openings led to a flood of unqualified people applying for jobs in healthcare.
1. Align the Interview with the Job Description

Make it easy for candidates to evaluate your organization and make sure you’re attracting qualified candidates. It starts with the job description.

“Write thorough job descriptions that specify the exact qualifications,” advises David Szary, Founder of LEAN Human Capital and The Recruiter Academy. He recommends HR professionals “add pre-qualification questions based on the non-negotiable requirements for the position to screen out unqualified individuals.”

However, healthcare recruiters are often dealing with volume. It’s not easy to accurately pre-qualify a large number of applications. That’s why it’s important to involve the decision makers and those who understand the role best. HR should involve hiring managers and their staff in the selection of dimensions and characteristics for the role and then apply those to the job description.

Lydia Ostermeier, the Director of Nursing Recruitment and Patient Care Services at Indiana University Health and NAHCR President, feels that partnering with the hiring managers right from the beginning is critical. “Increase emphasis on top talent and assume the responsibility as recruiters in the HR community for assisting and being a strategic partner with hiring managers to hire for the right fit.”

Start the Conversation with Social Media

Sourcing the best talent means being accessible to the best talent. The HealthcareSource and ASHHRA HR Initiatives Survey results, which surveyed 234 healthcare HR professionals, showed that 30% of the respondents chose “social media for recruitment” as one of their top HR initiatives for the coming year. Unless healthcare organizations get on board, they risk missing out on prime candidates, especially within the younger generations. Many forward-thinking healthcare organizations are using social media to their advantage. According to Jodi Weiss, Senior Recruiter at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics, social media can help show the world what a competitive and cutting edge facility you are, which is the ideal impression to make before a candidate comes in for an interview.

Some healthcare organizations can now add a job search tab to their Facebook page that links directly to their applicant tracking system. Children’s Mercy Hospital and Clinics recently began posting jobs on Facebook through their applicant tracking system, Position Manager®. To read more about how organizations are embracing social media for sourcing and interviewing, visit the HealthcareSource blog.
2. Be Consistent and Look for Cultural Fit

While many organizations have adopted a behavioral-based interviewing methodology, it’s still driven by people and is less effective or even problematic without a consistent approach. This is especially true for team-based interviewers because different interviewers walk away with different impressions of the same candidate.

Once you find those candidates who look good on paper, using behavioral-based assessment technology could be the best way to pre-screen candidates before they move forward in the interview process. These tools provide a consistent interview guide with questions designed to find the right personality and cultural fit for the position and for your organization. Just make sure everyone involved understands how the assessments work and utilizes a structured approach every time. “To source and find [the right] candidates, you need to understand how to use the tools – you can’t just post and hope,” said Jodi Weiss.

“Consistency in the interview process is critical,” noted Mark Wiersma, Assessment Division Manager for HealthcareSource. “Using a structured interview process ensures that candidates will be asked job-related questions built around critical job competencies.” From a risk management perspective, consistency and a structured interview guide is imperative. “Good questions mean good data,” said Mark.

To avoid asking “yes or no” questions and questions that lead candidates to give you the answers you want to hear, Mark recommends using the SAO method to obtain answers that demonstrate behaviors. The interviewer should take notes and listen for 3 components within the answer to the question:

**Situation (S):**
The situation or task facing the applicant

**Action (A):**
The actions the applicant took

**Outcome (O):**
The results or changes caused by those actions

The interview process should always be centered on hiring candidates who are an excellent fit for your organization – using a structured interview guide helps facilitate this. “Incorporate questions into your interview guides that focus on delivering patient satisfaction and service excellence because there’s a direct correlation between the care we provide and patient outcomes,” said Miranda Maynard, Employment Supervisor at EMH Healthcare. She recommends recruiters “use a behavioral-based, pre-employment assessment solution to help ensure they’re ultimately going to hire the right people.”

Jodi Weiss advises recruiters to “be a business partner with healthcare organizations by basing [their] behavioral-based interviewing on the organizations’ culture and values. No matter how talented a candidate, it’s not a good match if he or she won’t fit in with the culture – screen applicants for cultural fit. After all, you can train someone who is the right culture fit but the opposite is not true.”
3. Avoid Common Interviewing Mistakes

The healthcare HR professionals we interviewed highlighted 5 key errors that prevent healthcare organizations from hiring the best person for the job:

1. Undefined job expectations
Failing to define what characteristics you’re seeking make it impossible to come up with appropriate screening and interviewing questions. Do your homework before you create the job description to avoid vagueness.

2. Ignoring the rules:
Ignoring the interview guide and hiring a candidate anyway based on a “gut” feeling can be a mistake. A gut feeling is important and shouldn’t be completely ignored, but make sure you implement an interview guide at the same time for consistency.

3. Lack of education
Many organizations roll out methodologies but don’t support their implementation through proper training. Always rely on transparency throughout the process and provide training for hiring managers on how to use the interview guide.

4. Naivety
Falling for the “I want to get into healthcare to help people” response. To thrive in a service-based industry and competitive market, healthcare organizations need to focus on hiring customer oriented individuals who also have the competencies to succeed – not just the desire.

5. Talking too much
You shouldn’t spend more time speaking than the person you’re interviewing. Hiring a candidate when the interviewer does most of the talking can lead to inadequate hires. Make sure you’re selling and not telling during the interview.

Video Killed the In-person Interview

Well, video hasn’t killed the in-person interview (yet) and should not be viewed as a replacement for all in-person interviews. However, David Szary recommends recruiters “use video interviewing to more easily interview and access remote candidates. This technology makes good sense for those who want to get peers involved but are struggling with scheduling or logistics issues.”

Perhaps best of all, video screening allows recruiters to avoid wasting time sitting through an entire interview with a poorly qualified candidate. Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics has successfully hired RNs based solely on video interviews. Jodi Weiss noted, “We find that our evaluation of a candidate is consistent whether we’re interviewing them via video or in-person.”

Children’s Mercy proved the effectiveness of video interviewing by reducing the number of face-to-face and Saturday interviews required. “With a captured interview, we can screen and reject candidates who aren’t the right fit, and only bring in 100 candidates instead of 200 for 80 positions. The time savings alone has paid for itself. Plus, if we have more candidates than open positions, we can look back at videos when a position opens up again,” said Jodi.

However, many recruiters are facing resistance from senior management when it comes to this new technology. “Understanding the root of resistance to video interviewing,” advises David Szary.

Once you understand why they’re opposed, present a business case that sums up the many benefits of video interviewing. For example, video interviewing:

- Speeds up cycle times
- Enables consistent interviewing
- Facilitates peer interviewing with remote team members
- Saves on candidates’ travel costs

Ultimately, getting naysayers on board might be as simple as showing them a demo of how video interviewing works.
The healthcare organizations who contributed to this white paper average the following for staff-level recruiting:

- **15-30 minutes for a screening interview with a recruiter**
- **1 hour with a hiring manager**
- **1 hour for a peer interview**

Healthcare HR professionals can access in-depth benchmark metrics from **LEAN Human Capital** and directly compare their own performance against peer organizations.

Miranda Maynard is one of two recruiters at EMH Healthcare. To determine how they’re performing, she feels it helps to look at how EMH stacks up against other organizations. “Because we’ve participated in the **LEAN Human Capital benchmark study** for the past few years, we can easily see how we are performing within the industry and this is very useful information.”

Lydia Ostermeier agrees, “Participate in benchmark surveys such as those from **LEAN Human Capital** to identify strengths and weaknesses in your processes. Then re-define your processes if necessary to incorporate standardized best practices and support more evidence-based selection.”

In 2010, Miranda Maynard and her colleague interviewed 800 people to fill 350 positions; compared to organizations of a similar size, they determined EMH was on track, with a successful “interview to fill” ratio. By developing quality, efficient hiring processes, EMH can now focus on interviewing only those candidates who seem to be a good fit.

“Here’s an example of benchmarking data from **LEAN Human Capital** compared to internal data provided by over 1200 healthcare organizations that utilize **Position Manager**, an applicant tracking system from HealthcareSource.”

### Position Manager

- **Filled in < 60 days (81%)**
  - 309
  - Applications per position filled
  - Annual positions filled per recruiter
  - TTF - Overall hires

- **Filled in < 60 days (83%)**
  - 309

### Benchmark (similar size organizations)

- **Filled in < 60 days (71%)**
  - 229
- **Filled in < 60 days (69%)**
  - 229

### Benchmark (overall)

- **Filled in < 60 days (78%)**
  - 243
- **Filled in < 60 days (75%)**
  - 243
5. Automate the Interview Process

Software such as applicant tracking systems automatically manage much of the information and processes that were handled manually in the past. This includes matching applicants to jobs and responding to candidates. At the same time, these systems help ensure that information is properly routed, such as passing promising applications on to hiring managers, creating task alerts and follow through reminders.

With applicant tracking software, you can quickly send information to a hiring manager and get feedback. To make the interview process more efficient, train hiring managers on the interview process you’ve developed and provide them with standardized feedback forms to make it easier for everyone involved.

You can also use this software to create a library of worthwhile data. “Load all job descriptions into performance management software and build job postings from those,” advises Lydia Ostermeier. Also, add data to candidate records to make sure your hiring managers are well informed throughout the interview process.

There are many steps when it comes to interviewing and hiring for healthcare. Removing the hassle of a manual process is critical to making things more efficient. By tapping into new HR technology, healthcare organizations can improve the interviewing process and better establish themselves as an employer of choice.

6. Multiply the Impact of Team Interviews

Team interviews can help evaluate a candidate’s qualifications and fit for a role, but their effectiveness depends on how well you prepare and support the interviewers.

“It’s important to train new hiring managers and relevant staff on the ‘do’s and don’ts’ of interviewing by providing them with an interview guide ahead of time so they can review and adjust it to fit their needs,” advised Cathy Benson, Director of Employment and Recruitment at Spartanburg Regional.

Lydia Ostermeier recommends HR professionals “recruit and train high-performers in [their] organization for peer reviewing.”

Adrienne Cozart, Vice President of Human Resources at UMC Health System, feels transparency is especially important within a healthcare organization. “Consider posting your interview guide to your intranet along with policies, procedures, and sample questions.” This is a great way to make sure everyone is well-informed and serves as a reference point to avoid miscommunication throughout the process.

It’s also important to integrate legality measures into the employment process. Jodi Weiss advises recruiters to “help managers and other staff develop interview questions to ensure compliance with the law.” According to Miranda Maynard, “Many regulations and laws affect recruitment, an organization’s direction, what candidates you seek, and your hiring process. Stay abreast of industry changes and the healthcare recruitment market by researching and networking.” Make sure these new regulations influence your interview guide and keep all relevant staff up-to-date on any changes.
Indiana University (IU) Health, named among the ‘Best Hospitals in America’ by US News & World Report for five consecutive years, employs a novel approach to evaluating candidates based on their organization’s mission and culture.

For its academic health center comprised of three large health centers, IU Health receives up to 20,000 applications per month for the 2,000 nurse positions it seeks to fill each year. After using behavioral assessment software to screen for fit and ensure candidates have the service excellence characteristics IU Health is seeking, they invite the top candidates to a class called An Introduction to a Culture of Always. This class acquaints the candidates to the organization’s vision, mission and values.

After the class, participants interview with hiring managers, then shadow a peer in the work area for which they’re applying. This process provides candidates with a real taste for the organization and the position, while giving potential co-workers an opportunity to assess them.

According to Lydia Ostermeier, the ultimate measure of the new program’s success will be change in turnover and HCAHPS scores. Meantime, candidates have already provided positive feedback by telling IU Health it’s a terrific introduction to the organization, and recruiters have said they appreciate another set of eyes evaluating candidates in-person. Best of all, because they utilize an extensive and automated screening process beforehand, the program hasn’t slowed down the hiring process.

7. Bring your Organization’s Mission into the Interview

Conclusion: Keep Striving to Improve

Let’s review the 7 steps to improving your interview process.

1. Focus on providing the right job descriptions
2. Create and implement a consistent approach
3. Avoid and learn from past mistakes
4. Review your performance against other healthcare organizations
5. Automate the interview process
6. Build meaningful peer interviewing strategies
7. Let your organization’s mission influence the process

Successful healthcare HR professionals employ interview strategies built around their unique culture and mission to drive hires that make sense for their organization. They also stay up-to-date on the latest trends and strategies. The key to success is ensuring consistency while interviewing candidates – during each step of the process. This helps make the process more efficient, while providing candidates with an experience that leaves a positive impression and facilitates referrals.

These 7 concepts outlined in this white paper are important steps towards improvement, but there’s always more to cover. Don’t lose sight of any moving parts when re-designing the interview process — harness all the tools at your disposal to ensure the best results and remember to stay in the know.

To keep pace with the interviewing, hiring, and talent management changes in the healthcare HR field, subscribe to the HealthcareSource blog, Healthcare Talent Management and join the conversation on Facebook and Twitter.
About HealthcareSource
With over 1,500 healthcare facilities as clients, HealthcareSource® is the leading provider of talent management software for the healthcare industry. Through its software-as-a-service solutions, HealthcareSource helps healthcare organizations source, hire, assess and develop the best workforce possible in order to reduce costs and improve patient satisfaction and safety. The company’s talent management solutions include applicant tracking, onboarding, performance management, behavioral assessments, physician recruiting, video interviewing and a leading healthcare job board. A private corporation, HealthcareSource focuses exclusively on the healthcare industry and consistently earns high marks for client satisfaction and retention. www.healthcaresource.com

Contact HealthcareSource to learn more about our solutions
For more information, contact us at:
1.800.869.5200 or solutions@healthcaresource.com